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Report of the Divisions

Report of the USA/Canada Division

Submitted by USA/Canada Division *

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Report of the USA/Canada Division

SUMMARY

Since the Twenty-eighth session of UNGEGN in 2014, representatives of the USA/Canada Division have continued to work on areas of shared interest or concern. Each national naming authority has progressed on similar policy and technological questions.

Harmonious cooperation continues between the two countries at the state/provincial and national level to address issues important to both, such as: indigenous naming; promoting the use of official names; raising awareness of the importance of authoritative names; national and international standardization; and preserving and protecting geographical names as a reflection of culture and heritage. Going forward, the members of the Division are striving for even greater collaboration to further their common goals.

The United States Board of Geographical Names celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2015, while the Geographical Names Board of Canada is preparing for its 120th anniversary in 2017, in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of Canada.

Activities in the USA

The United States Board on Geographic Names (USBGN) celebrated its 125th Anniversary at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., on September 18, 2015. This one-day event featured a Symposium with invited speakers and an Open House that included a display of artifacts associated with geographic names and maps from the Library of Congress' Geography and Map Division.

The USBGN updated its 2001 bylaws, which were approved by the Secretary of the Interior, Ms. Sally Jewell, on September 28, 2015. The 2015 version of the bylaws updates the membership, establishes an Executive Secretariat composed of the Executive Secretaries for Domestic and Foreign Names, and clarifies the USBGN's voting procedures.

The Domestic Names Committee (DNC) standardizes geographic names within the United States and its sovereign areas for use by the U.S. Federal Government. The Domestic Names Committee receives research and database support from the staff of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The DNC prepared an information paper for the Secretary of the Interior on the background and history of the 1975 proposal from the former Governor of Alaska, Jay S. Hammond, to change the name of the highest peak in North America from Mount McKinley to Denali. The paper also provided details on the DNC's "Policy I: Names Being Considered by Congress." On August 28, 2015, the Secretary of the Interior, Ms. Sally Jewell, took a historic action to rename this iconic mountain by issuing Secretarial Order 3337, changing the name of Mount McKinley to the indigenous Athabaskan language name of Denali. This was the first time that a Secretarial Order has been used to name or to change the name of a feature since the USBGN was established in its current form by Public Law 80-242 in 1947. Ms. Jewell's action resolved a nearly 40-year deadlock between the USBGN and the U.S. Congress on the State of

Alaska's request to change the mountain's name. The deadlock resulted from the USBGN's deference to the U.S. Congress when a name is under congressional consideration.

A major accomplishment of the DNC was the successful review and approval of the Interim Policy X: Tribal Geographic Names, by the Department of the Interior Solicitor's Office and the Senior Policy Advisor for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. While the DNC regularly consults with Tribes on name proposals, the Interim Policy X will formalize this process and the relationship between the DNC and Federally-recognized tribes. Policy X is included in the revised document Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names which is in the process of being reviewed and signed by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior.

The DNC held its monthly meeting in conjunction with the Council on Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA) Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas in April 2014, and in Anchorage, Alaska in April 2015. DNC members participated in a State and Federal Roundtable and discussed issues and best practices common to both organizations.

As a result of limited funding, the DNC scaled back the collection and maintenance of names of selected manmade features in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). Ongoing modernization efforts are progressing slowly, and as a result are negatively impacting the production and dissemination of domestic geographic names.

The Foreign Names Committee (FNC) standardizes names of geographic features located outside the United States and its sovereign areas, as well as the names of oceans and seas, for use throughout the U.S. Federal Government. The FNC receives research and database support from the staff of the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA). The FNC, and the British Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) continue debating the advantages and disadvantages of two approaches for handling geographic names in non-Roman script: applying linguistically and scientifically rigorous romanization systems versus using less-rigorous romanized names that are commonly found in a given country or area. A general decline in the use of diacritical marks is driving the debate. As an example, the BGN uses French-style romanized names for geographic features in Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia instead of using the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic.

A working group of FNC members and staff continued to develop a Principles, Policies, and Procedures (PPP) document, which is expected to be complete in 2016. The FNC also approved country policy documents for eight countries: Germany, Guyana, Japan, Panama, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, and Ukraine.

The Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (ACAN) standardizes geographic names in Antarctica for use by the U.S. Federal Government. ACAN continued its collaboration with the Polar Geospatial Center (PGC) at the University of Minnesota. A new web-based program for quality assurance was expected to be operational by early 2015, but there were delays because of other priorities. However, work continues and the system should be tested and operational during 2016. This will allow ACAN members and staff, under the direction of the Executive Secretary, to conduct necessary work for quality assurance, primarily enhancements to geographic coordinates.

The Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF) standardizes geographic names for undersea features in offshore areas outside national territorial waters for use by the U.S. Federal Government. ACUF worked closely with the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN). The committee approved an additional 42 names from a previous SCUFN meeting in an effort to coordinate names between the ACUF and this international naming body.

The Special Committee on Communications (SCC) focuses on outreach related to the USBGN and to geographic names. The SCC assisted the Geography Educators Network of Indiana (GENI) with the development of a lesson plan on geographic names. The SCC members provided feedback to GENI and suggested a number of supplemental learning activities involving geographic names. The primary activity of the SCC was the year-long preparation of the USBGN's 125th Anniversary Celebration, which commemorated the September 4, 1890, signing of an Executive Order by President Benjamin Harrison that established the USBGN. The Library of Congress hosted the celebration on September 18, 2015, and presented the event in two parts: a Symposium and an Open House. The Open House, which followed the Symposium, featured the theme "The Power of Names" and included Library of Congress items related to "Early Geographic Names," "Traditions and Practices of the BGN," and the "Power of Names." Rare items included geographic names collected by Ptolemy; the first cartographic instance of the name "America"; and an early American gazetteer by Jedidiah Morse.

Activities in Canada

Since the Twenty-eighth session of UNGEGN in 2014, the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) has made significant advances in revitalizing and enhancing collaboration between Canada's federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities.

The GNBC adopted an ambitious, forward looking Strategic Plan to guide the Board's activities for the period 2015-2020 at its Annual Meeting in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in October 2014. The Strategic Plan includes several key objectives, including: renewed governance; strengthened policy and research; improved functionality of the national geographical names database; improved Aboriginal naming policy, partnership and outreach; a renewed national policy for undersea maritime naming; and increased awareness of the importance of authoritative geographical names. Since the adoption of the Strategic Plan, nine Working Groups composed of GNBC members have been actively meeting to implement the objectives outlined in the Plan. The Annual Meeting in Ottawa in 2015 re-confirmed the goals of the Strategic Plan, and provided a forum for reporting on advances on its implementation by each Working Group.

In May 2015, the Minister of Natural Resources Canada appointed a new Chairperson to the GNBC. Connie Wyatt Anderson, a history and geography educator on the Opaskwayak Cree Nation in Manitoba, was appointed as Chairperson for a five year term. Ms. Wyatt Anderson has authored or contributed to many articles, textbooks, teaching resources, and curricula at the provincial, national, and international level, and is a Governor of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society.

An important milestone in implementing the Strategic Plan was reached in July 2015, with the re-establishment of the GNBC Advisory Committee on Undersea Feature Names. This interdepartmental committee of experts will provide advice and recommendations to the GNBC on the naming of undersea features, and issues of terminology, translation and delineation. An effective and sustainable national process for experts to evaluate naming proposals for undersea features has been established to update the national geographical names data base with authoritative information.

Aligned with implementation of the Strategic Plan, the GNBC Secretariat within Natural Resources Canada undertook efforts to review and modernize operations to more efficiently and effectively support the needs of GNBC members. Coordination of the exchange of information between the various federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities constitutes a significant component of implementing the Strategic Plan. In 2015, the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base underwent a fundamental transition to a more efficient and interoperable geospatial-based data model. Alongside this effort, the GNBC Secretariat developed a consistent approach to geographical names decision processing, and implemented various improvements for handling and exchanging data. Efficiencies were achieved through a review of internal processes, the development of a new web-based application, and standardization and automation of validation processes wherever possible.

A national digitization strategy for GNBC materials was initiated in 2015, in particular to scan the extensive repository of Canada's official naming decisions and related documentation. The GNBC Secretariat maintains an historical collection of records that chart the toponymic history of Canada since 1897, including letters, documents and maps. This irreplaceable historical collection of documents was relocated to a secure climate-controlled facility, and is now being incrementally scanned to ensure the records are preserved and to facilitate on-line access and dissemination. Scanning these documents will serve two purposes: preservation of the hard copy version for the long term by avoiding further handling, and making the documents broadly accessible to the research community and general public via a Government of Canada open data portal.

In 2015, a special "Canada 150" working group was established to develop a joint project between federal, provincial and territorial naming authorities to commemorate and celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canada, as well as the 120th anniversary of the GNBC, in 2017. The project will develop a series of commemorative maps, each focusing on a specific toponymic theme, including traditional Aboriginal place names. The deliverables are aligned with the objective of the GNBC Strategic Plan as they will improve Aboriginal partnership and outreach, and raise the awareness of the importance of geographical names.

The GNBC Strategic Plan also recognizes the importance of international activities related to geographical naming. Involvement with international naming bodies contributes to several of the strategic objectives, by fostering standardization, facilitating the sharing of best practices, and providing a forum for exchange of ideas. A key component of that involvement is participation in UNGEGN sessions and United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

Division members and UNGEGN

Helen Kerfoot has continued to be involved in the work of UNGEGN since stepping down as Chair in 2012, by participating in meetings of the Working Groups for Publicity and Funding, Evaluation and Implementation, and Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, and the Romano-Hellenic Division. She has been an instructor at an UNGEGN training course in Tunisia (2015), as well as in Algeria (2014). She was a presenter at the Toponymy Day of the Salon international du livre d'Alger - SILA (2015) and at the USBGN 125th anniversary celebrations in Washington (2015).

Ms. Kerfoot also presented: “Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage and UNGEGN” in Seoul (2014), published in *Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage* (Kyung Hee University Press, 2015); “Geographical Names – the United Nations and contributions of women” to students at Ewha University, Seoul (2014) and “UNGEGN, national names authorities and cultural heritage” at *Place names as intangible cultural heritage*, organized by the RHD in Florence (2015; publication pending). Her paper “United Nations: geographical names standardization and gazetteers” will be published in *Placing Names: enriching and integrating gazetteers* (University of Indiana Press, 2016).

Ms. Kerfoot has continued to support the work of the Task Team for Africa and has cooperated with the UNGEGN Secretariat and experts in building up archival document resources on the UNGEGN website, by continuing to gather data to add to the UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database, and by updating UNGEGN’s information on national names authorities.

Members of the Division also collaborate with UNGEGN as a result of positions held by Division Members, including U.S. members Leo Dillon, Trent Palmer, and Roger Payne. Mr. Dillon serves as co-Convener of the Working Group on Country Names. Mr. Palmer is the liaison between UNGEGN and the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), and was also elected as rapporteur at the UNCSCN in 2012. Mr. Payne serves as the liaison between UNGEGN and the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH). Individual Division members also participate in several of the UNGEGN working groups, and Canadian members participate in the work of the French-speaking Division.